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AUTHOR Mizell, Al P.; And Others
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ABSTRACT

KidLink is a project that began in 1991 with the goal of putting children from around the world in touch with one another, largely through computer telecommunications. The Kids-91 project and its successor, Kids-92, introduced children to global communication on the KidLink network. Kids-91 posed four questions to children, asking them to describe themselves and their aspirations, as well as their hopes for the world's future. KIDS-91 received responses from 2,600 children in 31 countries. In its first year, KidLink had six different activities for teachers and students, and children had four different electronic discussion forums: (1) KIDCAFE, for any subjects they chose; (2) RESPONSE, originally responses to the four descriptive questions, and today a database of information about children; (3) KIDPEACE, a discussion about war and peace which was later closed to avoid politicizing the network; and (4) KIDS-ACT, a forum for discussing shaping the future. While adults were not allowed to join the children's discussions, children did have access to the two adult forums, KIDS-91 (background information and exchanges) and KIDPLAN (the planning room for the project). Guidelines are suggested for teachers who want to interest their students in KidLink, and some examples are given from the experiences of participating teachers. (SLD)

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GLOBAL COMMUNICATIONS: KIDS-92

Al P. Mizell, Nova University
Pam Carroll, Miramar Senior High School
Vivian Haddad, University School of Nova University

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INTRODUCTION

It's 8:10 A.M., Thursday morning. Paul rushes into his classroom and breathlessly asks Ms. Smith if she's heard anything back from his last online message about pollution control in other parts of the world. Ms. Smith says, "Why, yes, Paul. I just went online through our classroom computer and found three messages addressed to you. In fact, I've already downloaded them and printed 'em out for you. They're over there on your desk."

Naturally, Paul couldn't wait to see who had answered his messages through the KidCafe Global Online Network. He was anxious to see what other kids were doing about pollution in their home towns. Was it the same sort of thing that he was doing here in Florida or were they doing things like the kids in Germany and Ireland said they were doing last week? After all, the success of his six-week Environmental Science project hinged on the kind of replies he got back in the next few days.

"When you stop to think about it," Paul thought, "it's really pretty amazing that I can sit here at the computer in my classroom and type a message to send out to a lot of kids all around the world and a bunch of them write right back to me and it's as easy as hitting the "abc" keys on their computers!"

No, this is not a scene from "Beverly Hills, 2001!" It's a description of what actually happened this year in a 7th grade class here in Broward County (see Appendix A). Yes, Paul is quite right; global communications among kids can be as easy as "a, b, c!" And **you** can become the catalyst that makes it happen in your school.

Wait a minute! You may be thinking: "How did Paul's class get in on this neat approach to global communications? Why can't **my** students "talk online" like those in Paul's class?" Well, by the end of this paper, you will know how you **can** get your students online talking with other kids around the world.

We have begun to see an ever-increasing number of articles describing telecommunication activities. In the October, 1990, issue of the Phi Delta Kappan, Bruce Watson (p. 176) provides several examples of global communications as education goes online:

> "...last year a group of junior high students in Madison, West Virginia, reached across an ocean, a continent, and the remnants of an Iron Curtain to communicate with their peers in Moscow. The letters from the Appalachian students did not contain much more than 'Hello, how are you?' and news of Madison Middle School. Replies from School No. 25 in Moscow asked about cars and blue jeans.
>
> "After students in his school's computer course composed their letters, (Bruce) Williams (the Principal) booted up the school's modem-equipped computer, went "on-line," and sent the letters electronically, through an elaborate network of nodes and computer bulletin boards, to the FREDMail system. From there, the letters--by now transformed to electronic pulses--traveled by phone to a network in western Canada. Bouncing from computer to computer, the letters went to the East Coast of the U.S. and eventually found their way to GreenNET in London, where a few Soviet schools call in regularly to pick up their electronic mail.

Watson goes on to describe other online services, including the fact that seventeen states have statewide networks of BBSs. The online services for communication that he mentions include CompuServ, PRODIGY, Dialog, IRIS, SCHOOLINK, the National Geographic Society's Kids' Net, TERC, SpaceMet, Fido Net, and FrEdMail.

In Technology and Learning, Dave Weaver (April, 1991; p. 14) describes the use of FrEdMail to put students in various U.S. schools in touch with one another to discuss the impact and meaning of the Persian Gulf conflict via a special conference called "Active Duty." In this same issue, a list and description of several telecommunication services appears.

In most of the telecommunication projects accessible by teachers today, a teacher must either pay an online fee for each use of the system or must apply for selection as a participant in a specially funded project. In either case, these restrictions greatly limit the number of schools that are likely to get online. What is needed for wide-spread global communications is a system that can accommodate many teachers yet will entail little or no cost to the school, class, or individual.

At an FETC Conference in 1991, I attended a session by Dr. Rosemary Lee Potter wherein she described an ongoing telecommunications project, "The Florida-England Connection." After the session, I asked her how I could get online with schools in other countries. She gave me an electronic mail (email) address, reachable through the Internet system, for Norwegian educator Odd de Pressno. I was aware that my university supported

Bitnet and Internet so I presumed that I would be able to send a message to this email address. The only catch was that I had no idea how to use either Bitnet or Internet.

Since I had never ventured to try to send email anywhere outside of my own university system, I was hesitant to make my first effort. One night, about two weeks later, I was working late at the office and I was online reading my email when I saw a letter from Rosemary with Odd's Internet address. I thought to myself, "Oh, what the heck! I can at least give it a try. The worst that can happen is that the message won't be delivered but merely returned to me. So I sent a brief note to Odd de Presno using the rather strange electronic address I had been given: "opresno@ulrik.uio.no."

Imagine my surprise the next morning when I checked my email to find that I had received a long reply from Odd, explaining the KidsLink project and an outline of the steps needed to join. If I were to succeed in a message correctly to the project's host computer in North Dakota, I would receive an automatic reply and some 30 to 50 messages each week thereafter. I decided to strike while the iron was hot so I sent my short message to the host computer. Bingo! I then received an online message confirming my membership in the Kids-91 project and immediately began receiving

Procedures for Joining Kids-92

Your first step is to get your local university or school system to provide you with an electronic mail account and to be sure that system gives you access to either Bitnet or Internet. Next, send an email message to the host machine asking to be put into the Kids-92 system. To do this, go online and type the following if you are on Internet:

mail listserv@vm1.nodak.edu

[If you are on Bitnet, type:

mail listserv@ndsuvm1]

Then in the body of the message, type the following statement:

SUB KIDS-92 yourfirstname yourlastname

Once this message is received by the North Dakota host computer, you will be a member of the Kids-92 activity in the KidsLink project.

messages sent into the system by students and teachers around the world for relay to all members of the project.

WHAT IS KIDSLINK?

Kidslink is the name of a project that began in 1991 with the goal of putting kids from around the world in touch with one another by various means. The major tool to be used was computer telecommunications. The concept took shape in bed one night in late 1989 when a Japanese woman turned to her husband, Odd de Pressno, and said, "I'm organizing a Children's Cultural Week in our town nest year. What will you do to help?"

Odd said that his wife is a rather strong-willed women, so, to get back to sleep, he promised, "I'll arrange for our daughter to communicate keyboard-to-keyboard with the granddaughter of Dave Hughes in the USA. Everything will be displayed on a big screen."

Fortunately, Odd said that while he promptly forgot his promise, his wife didn't. In April 1990, she came back to him and wanted a progress report. On April 30th, Odd invited American networkers on several online services to help set up a chat for children on May 12th. A young woman from Washington, DC, Nancy Stefanik, took the idea to a group of teachers on SciNet, which is a Canadian conferencing system.

Odd reported that during the fourteen days between April 30th and May 12th, 260 children from three countries participated in the dialog. The 14-day experiment was organized as part of a childrens' cultural week in Arendal, Norway. The results were presented at the Electronics Networking Association's Conference in San Francisco a few weeks later, and Kids-91 was born. During the next year, May 12, 1990 - May 12, 1991,

Odd calculated that some 2600 children from 31 countries participated in the Kids-91 project. Today, the third project, Kids-92, is well under way. A generic name was selected as an umbrella for all of the annual projects: "KIDLINK - Global Networking for Youth 10-15."

The original concept, according to Odd, was simple: "... to collect responses from children between 10 - 15 years of age to four questions:

1) Who am I?

2) What do I want to be when I grow up?

3) How do I want the world to be better when I grow up?

4) What can I do now to make this happen?

It had started as a grassroots communication movement and will continue as such. In addition, the children were encouraged to illustrate their "future vision" in the form of a drawing, a videotape, etc. and were to be sent to Odd by ordinary mail (often called "snail mail" or "smail").

Odd goes on to say: "We did not want participation in Kids-91 to be limited to three countries. Children all over the world were invited to an ongoing global dialog starting in May 1990 and ending in May 1991. This is the activity within the KidsLink project that is known as "Kids-91." On its anniversary on May 12, 1991, this activity ended and the current "Kids-92" activity began. The two activities are similar in operation and purpose. If the concept should continue, following a world-wide celebration on May 12, 1992, Kids-92 will merge into 'Kids-93'. Our initial ambitions were enormous, but still limited. We simply set out to collect personal presentations - by electronic or ordinary post office mail - and we wanted to collect creative contributions."

It was the right idea at the right time:

* the explosive growth of personal computers around the world allowed millions of people to send electronic letters to others. The letters could be sent by telephone to a computer center to be saved on a disk there. Later, the letters could be picked up by the receiver whenever he or she had time, it be today, tomorrow or next month.

* KIDS-91 received responses to the four questions from 2600 children in 31 countries. They came by electronic mail from countries as far apart as Argentina, Puerto Rico, Finland, Australia, India, Russia, and Japan.

* the cost of communication had dropped dramatically during the last couple of years. Suddenly, sending mail to computer centers in the United States and Japan was an affordable opportunity for teachers, parents, and social workers around the world.

* even people within the Soviet Union could find the money to involve their children. We received responses from Leningrad (now St. Petersburg), Moscow, Armenia, Lithuania, Estland, and several other recently free countries in Eastern Europe.

* electronic mail is not as quick as the telefax, but much quicker than ordinary mail. There are significant advantages by sending the mail electronically. One thing is that the receivers can use the messages that they received in various forms.

For example:

Mike Gorlovoy in Protvina, USSR, and Alicia Banuelo in Buenos Aires could receive the different versions of the KIDS-91 newsletters, and print them out for local distribution on paper. The responses could be stored on a hard disk somewhere, and anybody can search the messages to find information of interest.

* many computer centers allowed the use of electronic mailing lists. These list can be compared with those that many of us use to send New Year greeting cards to our friends. Using computers, however, our messages can be distributed to many people, much quicker.

We also had electronic equivalents of the electronic meeting, of "Clubs" and "Conferences". One of these clubs was called KIDCAFE. Using electronic meetings, a structured dialog was possible.

KIDS-91 was given free space for administering the electronic meetings on a computer center in North Dakota, USA. All the discussion and news about the project were distributed electronically to the "subscribers" of so-called mailing lists. Later, our discussion forum became several forums, and the focus of the project was extended from just being a system of collecting children's responses into a continuous global dialog between them.

* the ability of computer centers to send private electronic mail and public conference mail to other systems around the world had rapidly improved. This further decreased the costs of writing to and discussing with other people. Geographical distance between people are quickly disappearing as a major obstacle for those who want to talk or do things together.

THE MAN

Who is the man who began this successful world-wide communications project? **Odd de Presno** was the person responsible for the Norwegian operations of Control Data's global online services from 1976-1981 in a project known as "CYBERNET." Since he has earned his living since 1976 "by modem," he was well-prepared to originate and implement a global communications project for children. When Datapak, a Norwegian packet switching service,

made foreign online services available at a very low cost in 1983, Odd said that his "... work as a journalist/modem globe-trotter enabled him to move from the big city to a scenic place by the sea, far away from noise and pollution." Now that's user-friendly and ecologically safe.

THE FOUR ACTIVITIES WITHIN KIDSLINK

During its first year, KidsLink had six different activities for teachers and/or students. Each of these activities was a separate electronic discussion forum. Members could join one, several, or all of the forums. Teachers and other adults could share their ideas in the forum known as Kids-91 (now it is "KIDS-92). There is also a planning room for further discussion on projects that is known as "KIDPLAN."

The children had four different electronic discussion forums:

KIDCAFE the place where they could discuss whatever they wanted to talk about. This message came from children in a school in Paterson, USA, to a boy in Israel during the war in the Middle East.

RESPONSE where the children sent in their responses to the four questions. Today, it's a searchable data base filled with information for educators, researchers, and other interested persons.

KIDPEACE a discussion forum for War and Peace that we had during the Middle East conflict. KIDPEACE was later closed. We did that because we did not want people to think that KIDS-91 was a peace activist movement.

KIDS-ACT a discussion forum where the children could discuss "What They could do Now" to shape their own future. While KIDCAFE was a place to get to know others or get pen pals, KIDS-ACT was a place to coordinate projects, discuss important problems etc.

SENDING IN THE RESPONSES

To send your kids' responses, send an email message

- *On Internet to:* ***RESPONSE@VM1.NODAK.EDU***
- *On Bitnet to:* ***RESPONSE@NDSUVM1***
- *On CompuServe to:* ***>INTERNET:response@vm1.nodak.edu***
- *On AppleLink to:* ***RESPONSE@VM1.NODAK.EDU@INTERNET#***
- *On AT&T Mail to:* ***internet!ndsuvm1.bitnet!response***

These discussion forums were for children between 10 - 15 only. Adults were not allowed to join the discussion. The two forums for adults, with free access for everybody, are also briefly described below:

KIDS-91 where interested people could get information about the development of KIDS-91, get background information and exchange experiences.

ADULT PROJECT PLANNING

To join in the sharing of ideas and planning for ways to get broader benefits from global communications, join the adult KIDPLAN discussion group. Send an email message to: listserv@vm1.nodak.edu with this comment in the text of your message:

SUB KIDPLAN Yourfirstname Yourlastname

KIDPLAN The planning room. Everything was discussed openly and freely, from technical solutions to networking problems to ethical and political issues in need of a policy decision.

Knut Braatane of the Norwegian Council of Advanced Eduction said: "Participating in KIDPLAN has been as important to me as it has been for the children to participate in KIDCAFE and KIDS-ACT. I have learned valuable lessons about computer conferencing

and how to make decisions in an online forum."

The KidLink project was one-year old on May 12, 1991. This was proclaimed an international celebration by the Kids-91 volunteer staff. The children were invited to "chat" with each other in a huge, global electronic dialog. Each city was encouraged to celebrate it in the best way they could that would include getting as many children in touch with kids in other countries as possible. Every type of communication device available was pressed into service. This ranged from the usual computer and modem over phone lines to ham radios, fax machines, VuPhones, and satellite teleconferences.

On that same date we were to exhibit the visual creative responses in Arendal, Norway. Afterwards, selected parts of the exhibition were to be shipped back to the children of the world for them to see and enjoy.

Odd described the celebration in this way: "News about the project was broadcast through radio and TV in many countries. On the last day of the project, KIDS-91 was turned into a mass medium in it's own right. We invited the children of the world to participate in a more interactive and direct dialog using all available technologies.

A 12-year old Norwegian girl, Line, started the day by talking by computer with Japanese children, who called in through the data center TWICS in Tokyo. At lunch-time she was chatting with children in Europe. When we took her away from the computer at 10.30 at night, she was busy talking with American children.

Groups of children in USA, Canada, England, Ireland, Finland, and Norway discussed world problems by video conferencing. Groups of Norwegian and American children talked via video telephone. Children's drawings travelled the world by fax.

KIDS-92

On May 13, 1991, the sequel to Kids-91 began. Known as Kids-92. the project was very similar to Kids-91. In Kids-92, there are three forums for children and four for adults. KIDS-92 has now been going for more than five months. The project will continue until May 19th, 1992. Then, KIDS-93 will start. The structure and objectives are the same. We have already received children's responses from three new countries: Korea, Kenya and Chile. The children's forums in Kids-92 are:

- RESPONSE
- KIDCAFE
- KIDS-ACT

The coordinators/adult persons forums are:

- KIDS-91 now only used for review of KIDS-91
- KIDS-92 for general information about the current project
- KIDPLAN the detailed coordination forum
- KIDPLAN2 an electronic project room, where more detailed time limited topics can be discussed whenever the need is there.

PROJECTS THAT YOU CAN DO IN KIDSLINK

Many of you have projects, that you would like other KIDLINK people to get involved in. We can help you achieve this in the following way:

1. You can apply to have your project approved as a KIDLINK project. Approved projects are allowed to use KIDS-92 to get people involved, and to keep them up to date with the progress of the project.

2. Projects that are not approved as KIDLINK projects, should contain no reference to KIDLINK, and will not be permitted to use KIDLINK's discussion list/forums. We will be pleased to inform our members about the existence of your project, though, subject to the following policy:

"KIDLINK may make material/information about world problems and associated projects to solve these problems available to the local organizers of the KIDLINK projects. This information is to be made available as files to be retrieved from the KIDS-9x archives. Such information is not to be distributed to KIDCAFE or KIDS-ACT. So if you have a non-KIDLINK project to announce, send it to me (opresno@ulrik.uio.no), and I will upload it as a file and send an announcement to the KIDS-92 list.

Some local examples of the way KidLink has been put into practice may be of value to you now:

Pamela J. Carroll is a teacher of English, Gifted and Critical Thinking at Miramar High School, Broward County, Florida. She describes her experiences in this public high school to help you see how you might implement this project in your own school.

At the onset of this school year, an article in the Nova Alumni News peaked my interest. It presented alumni an opportunity to have their students participate in a global network free of charge. My eagerness to implement this program at Miramar High School was supported by the administration. As my pilot group, I targeted the students, ninth through twelfth

graders, in Unique Skills for the Gifted, a course to help them expand their global awareness through telecommunications. This course is one in which individuality, creativity, logic, computer ethics, leadership, and futuristics are inherent components.

In preparation for their eminent adventure, they selected destinations and set objectives for their future global dialog. The locations selected, as well as the reasons for the choices, are quite varied. Their targeted destinations encompass England, France, Israel, and Australia. Their objectives for these choices range from interest in the countries themselves to personal interests. Several students which to learn about the attitudes and customs of other cultures. They desire to converse with their foreign peers about subjects such as fashion, food, studies, trends, dating, recreation, and TV. Some of the immigrant students in this multicultural class hope to get online with friends and relatives in their homelands. One American born student wishes to attempt to trace her heritage in France and perhaps to contact some of her distant relatives. Yet another student desires to communicate online in French to further develop fluency in his second language. Beyond satisfying their natural curiosity, all the students see the value of this global network in relationship to their academics.

To actually get online has taken quite a while since, at my worksite, I laced access to essential equipment - a computer, a communications card, a modem, and a phone line, for instance. With assistance from a network of colleagues (especially Al Mizell) at both Nova and Miramar, my students are now about to embark upon their global communications. They foresee using online communique for upcoming research projects in science and social

studies. Moreover, they eagerly anticipate the opportunity to be part of a vast network on the cutting edge of technology.

Vivian I. Haddad, is a computer teacher in the University School of Nova University and instituted this project with middle school students. However, it is now spreading to the high school as well. Vivian describes the way she began implementation in this private school.

I personally started with Kids-92 during the 90-91 school year with the help of Dr. Al Mizell. Dr. Mizell and I both work for Nova University, he as the Director of Technology and I as the computer teacher at the University School. Although not many of our students were participating at the time, I had the opportunity to explore and get acquainted with its features and capabilities.

Throughout the summer, I prepared and planned on not only getting myself involved, but also other faculty members and their students. Since our building houses grades six through twelve, this was an easy task. My first approach was the sixth grade who was very enthusiastic in getting involved through their English classes. They wrote their letters in class and then came to the computer lab to word process them and sent out through the system. The seventh grade, which focuses on U.S. geography in their Social Studies classes, had their letters sent to other students within the United States as far away as Alaska. They compared and discussed such things as the weather, rock music and school rules. The eighth grade wanted to be more adventurous and communicated with students throughout many European countries, such as Norway, Sweden, Italy and Czechoslovakia. Through their ventures, participating students were found in France, Spain and other countries who wanted

to communicate in their native language so our Foreign language department also has become actively involved.

An add-on bonus to the Kids-92 program is that not only have our students become involved and have thoroughly enjoyed the experience, our faculty has as well. Many have started communicating with fellow peers. Sharing ideas, experiences and frustrations has become a new venture and opportunity.

We are currently working in getting our high school students to participate as well. The process of pairing them up with students their age and who share their interests is well under way.

The experience has been wonderful for all. Students have truly gained from their experiences and made new friends, who many hope to meet some day. Teachers have formed relationships with other peers globally. We all truly have reached out and touched someone.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Florida teachers are especially fortunate at this particular time. The State Department of Education Florida Information Resource Network (FIRN) has expanded the state electronic network in the form of **FIRNMAIL.** FIRNMAIL has recently established a gateway into the Internet system so any Florida teacher with an account on FIRNMAIL can join the KidsLink project with a local phone call! Contact the FIRN office in Tallahassee (904/487-0911 or Suncom 277-0911) to find how you can get your free FIRNMAIL account.

Nova University has taken the lead in getting Florida teachers into the KIDLink project. Any Florida teacher who is a Nova alumnus can apply with Nova to connect their class into

the KidsLink network or they can obtain access through FIRNMAIL. In either case, they should let Al Mizell at Nova University (800/541-6682, ext. 7461) know that they are planning to join KidsLink. In this way, training materials, instructions, and online help can be provided to facilitate your work in the Kids-92 project. Nova graduates may apply for their own classes or they may sponsor another professional who wishes to join. Any educator or parent may also join KidsLink directly on their own.

It is conceivable that a training grant may be requested so that members of the Nova University staff can provide training sessions in various areas of the state to facilitate greater use of this new and valuable method of linking the global village.